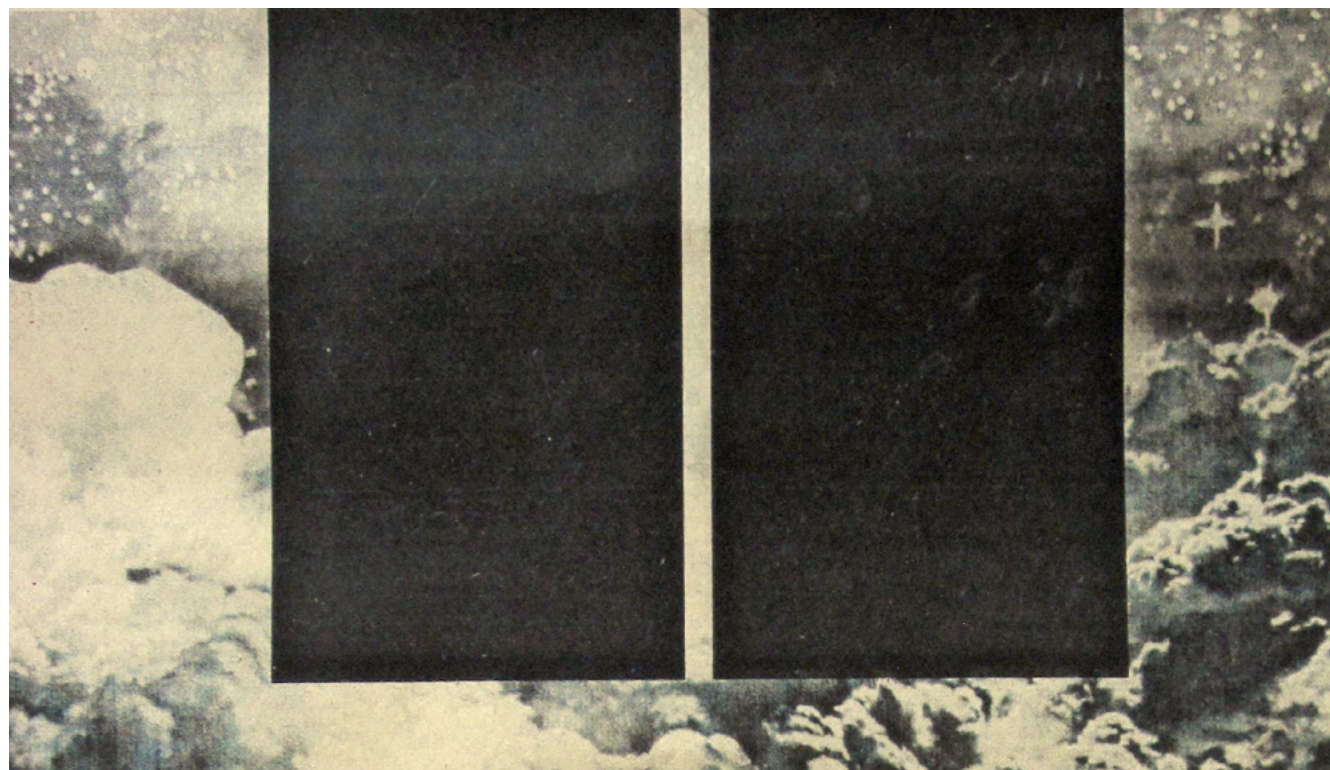


The Blue Balcony

A cinema-sculpture by *et al.



“I LOVE TO GO TO THE CINEMA: THE
ONLY THING THAT BOTHERS ME IS
THE IMAGE ON THE SCREEN.”

TWA, *Minima Moralia*



ET AL.‘S
BLUE BALCONY

The Blue Balcony is a sculpture that recreates a grand cinema of 1920's and offers an abstraction of the expected cinematic experience.

From the outside the sculpture resembles a non-descript plywood shack propped up on stilts with a narrow staircase allowing access to the interior.

Upon entering the sculpture, one is immersed in a heavily detailed and colorful environment. Three rows of cinema chairs and a projection booth all on stepped platforms help to create a sense of height and depth.

- From top to bottom:
1. Exterior view of the sculpture.
 2. Interior view of the sculpture showing one of the windows and part of the north wall.





View from outside looking into the balcony.



The audience during a nightly Sans-Screening.

In addition to the usual elements one would expect in a cinema (theater chairs, projection booth, exit sign, floor tiles, carpet, aisle lights etc.), the Blue Balcony goes further to reference the ‘atmospheric’ movie houses of the 1920’s where the walls of the auditorium resemble a permanent Hollywood stage set with fake building façades under an artificial starry night sky. In the Blue Balcony, these elements are realized using materials such as colored paper, fabric, and textured wallpaper in place of plaster, paint and glass.

Moreover the Blue Balcony distinguishes itself from conventional cinemas with the absence of a projection screen and projector. In place of the screen are two giant plate glass windows looking to the outside. During nightly ‘Sans Screenings’ movies are played with soundtrack intact, but sans image. The visual component of the film is nonetheless present as an abstraction of light realized via dynamic lighting effects.

From top to bottom:
1. Interior view of the North wall and projection booth.
2. Interior view of the South wall.



These special lighting effects are generated by a computer algorithm that analyzes the movie and translates images into values of light intensity.

To do this, each film frame has been divided into a grid with nine sections. Each section has been processed by the algorithm determining the overall luminosity level of that section, in total outputting nine values.

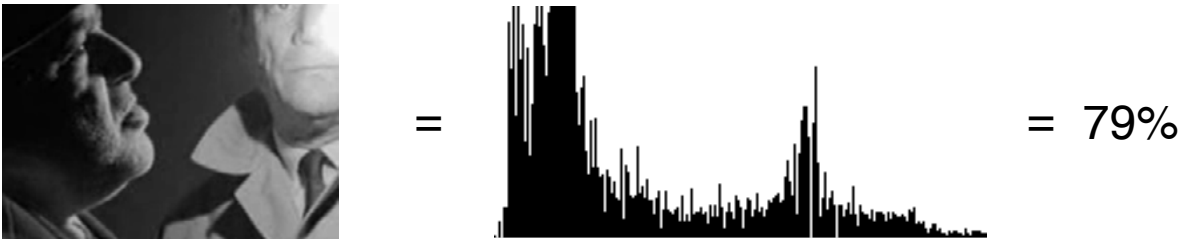
The values are then matched with nine individually controlled sources of light embedded in the walls of the balcony, and thus creating a pulsating periphery that reenacts the event of light bounced off a projected movie screen and onto the walls—though this time sans screen. For video documentation please visit: <http://bluebalcony.weebly.com/>



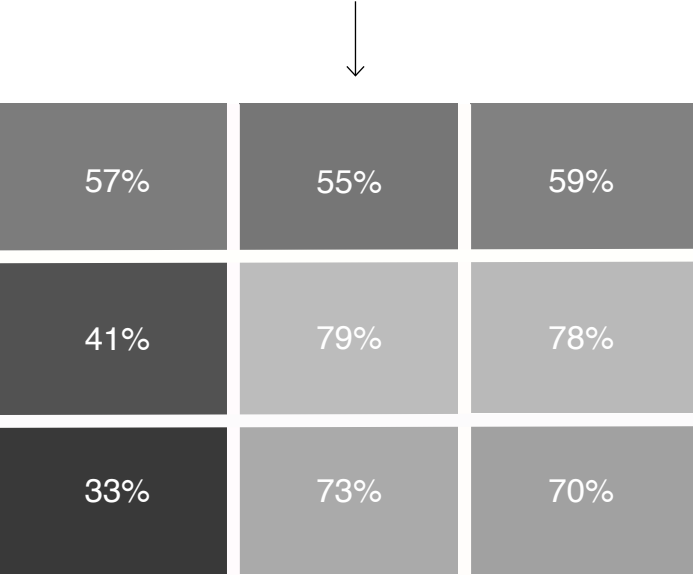
Film frame at 00:23:53:41 from: *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1965.



The frame is split into a grid with nine sections.



The luminosity is calculated by taking an average of the overall density of light of the section. This step is repeated for all nine sections.

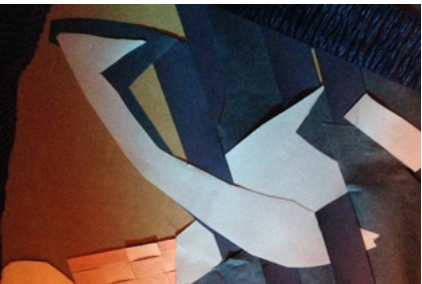
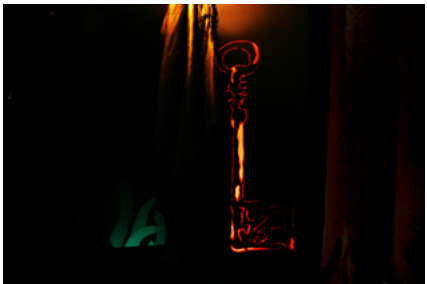


The data from the nine sections is sent to electrical dimmers corresponding to levels from 0 to 100.



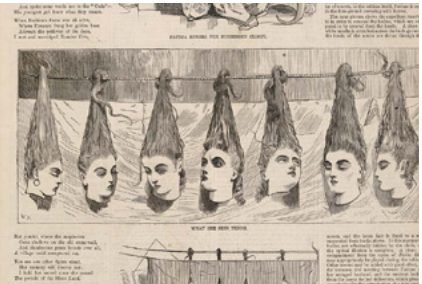
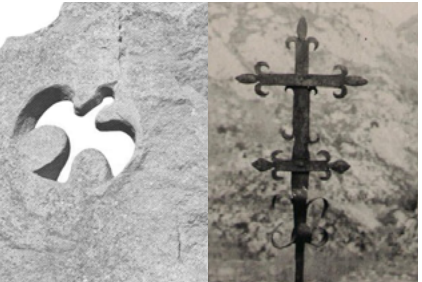
These levels control the intensity of electric lighting in nine areas of the sculpture.

Thematically the balcony alludes to Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist fairy tale *The Blue Bird*, as well as to the no-longer-extant labyrinth of Louis XIV's Gardens of Versailles and the 1924 silent cubist film *L'Inhumaine*, featuring Georgette Leblanc as a vampish chanteuse at home in the modern designs of the French architect Robert Mallet-Stevens.

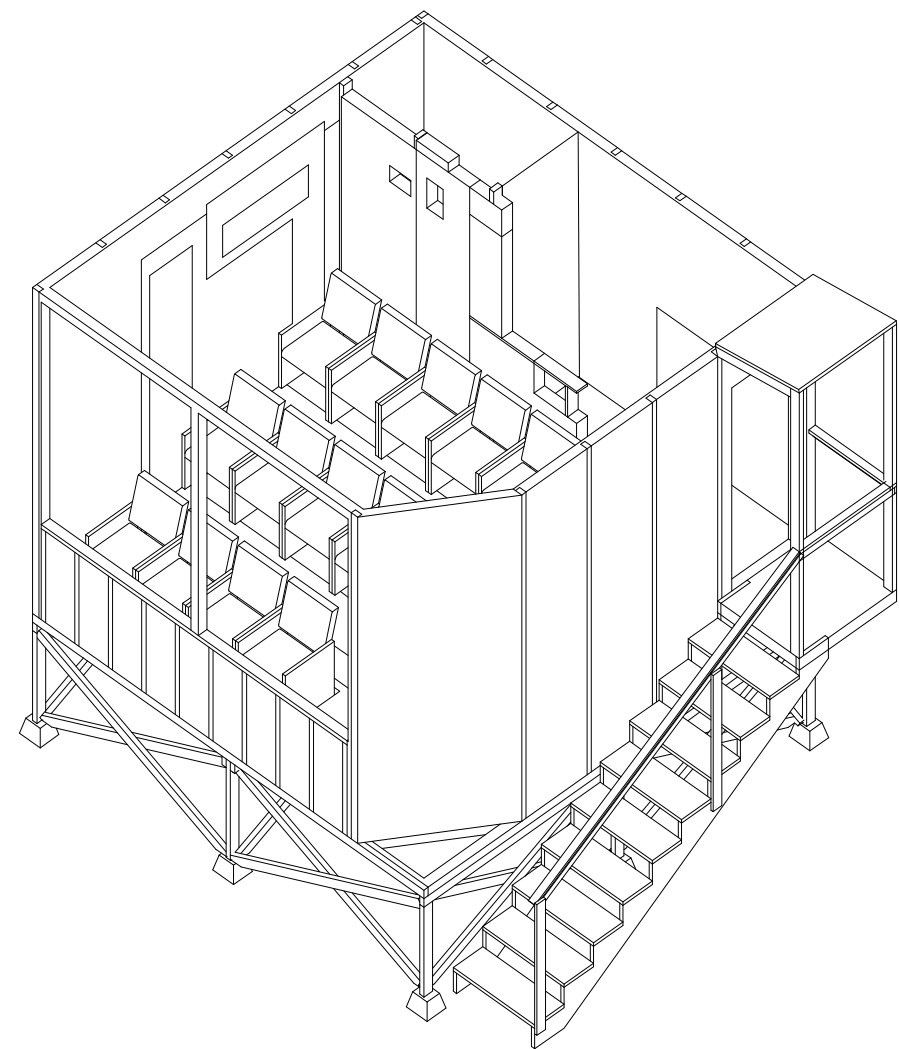


from left to right, top to bottom :

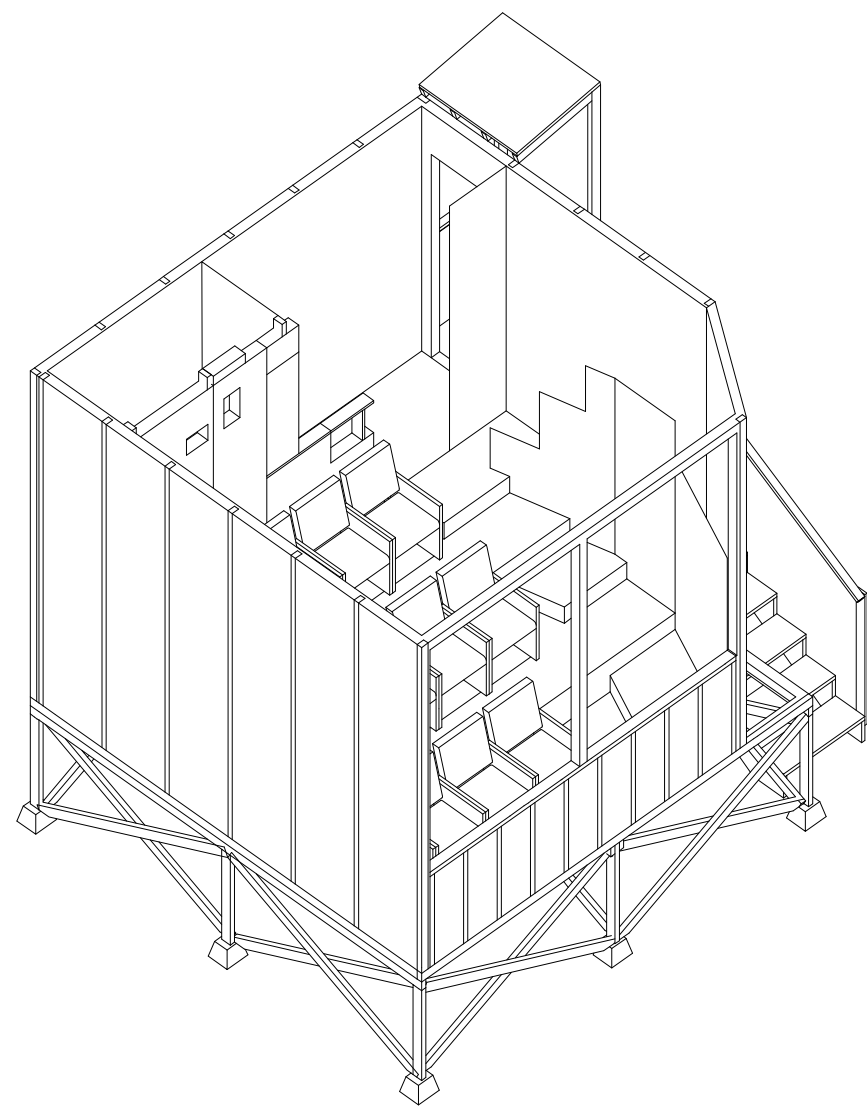
1. *Le Décor Moderne au Cinéma*, Robert Mallet-Stevens, 1928; plate 17.
2. Stone Esclarmonde of Foix transformed into a dove, IE a memorial to the Cathar "martyrs" and Cathar Cross In Lordat, Photo By Otto Rahn (Appr. 1932)
3. Illustration by Fernand Khnopff for Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles*.
4. Illustration in *Harper's Bazar*, September 5, 1868, showing how to stage the seven hanging wives of Bluebeard.
5. Preparatory sketch depicting the South wall.
6. Francisco Goya, *Maja Celestina on a Balcony*, 1812.
7. *Le Décor Moderne au Cinéma*, Robert Mallet-Stevens, 1928; plate 20.
8. Image of the blood stained keys from Georges Méliès's *Barbe-bleue* 1902.
9. Jean Metzinger, *L'Oiseau Blue*, 1912.



Isometric drawing showing the North wall and projection booth plus the windows and staircase. The main part of the structure is 12 feet long by 12 feet wide and 10 feet high. The structure rests on stilts that are approximately 5 feet off the ground.



Isometric drawing showing the South wall plus the entrance and windows. Inside the structure the stepped levels vary in height from the first row of seats up to the projection booth with a difference of 30 inches total.



Bruce Benderson on the Blue Balcony

Bruce is a novelist, essayist and a translator. Published by Dutton, Penguin/Tarcher, Plume and Semiotext(e), the New York Times Magazine, the Village Voice, Libération. 2004 winner of the Prix de Flore in France for The Romanian: Story of an Obsession.

In order to see an installation called The Blue Balcony, I arrived at a Manhattan community garden in the East Village known as the Versailles. It was after 10 at night, and I was full of liquor, after a much more accessible opening at a more conventional gallery. The installation I had come to see here was essentially a graceful-looking shed perched on stilts, inside of which a rising tier of blue-and-turquoise movie theater seats faced an improvised picture window, revealing nothing more than the darkened branches of winter-bare trees and the surface of the adjoining building on the outside. This was, nevertheless, an intimate and relaxing atmosphere with a sense of freedom. No need to maintain a hushed silence and glue my eyes to the movie in front of me. In fact, there was no movie, though aural intimations of several movie soundtracks from cinema’s pre-War golden age piped through speakers.

The ceiling of this structure was beautiful but is difficult for me to describe. Looked at closely, you saw a welter of lights from mysterious sources filtering through haphazard scraps of something that seemed part cathedralesque and part funhouse; but from a distance, it all looked like a romantic constellation of stars. A welter of fetishistic looking objects littered the walls, their meanings absolutely impenetrable to me. I’d later learn that all of them had been painstakingly researched, but I still think that their uncodeable obscurity is one important element of these artists’ position.

Cinema or not, there was something rather Japanese about this structure, especially since everything forced your gaze toward the expansive panoramic view. Was such a style an echo of the Japanese value that demands integration of dwelling with nature and the changing seasons, as opposed to that habit of constructing protective barriers against nature, at the basis of most Western architecture? I would soon learn that such a guess, along with many more of my

attempts at interpretation, was specious. In fact, rather than delivering the occupant to nature, the purpose of the Blue Balcony was partly a citation of something very artificial and deceptively confining: those kitsch movie palaces preceding the mid twentieth century and known as “atmospheric theaters,” whose ceilings mimicked open sky, usually because it was cheaper than a more ornate structure and created the illusion of being outdoors. More often than not, these theaters were “Las-Vegasy” evocations of exotic foreign or historical settings—a village garden in Sorrento, a Greek amphitheater or a palace garden. In the case of the Blue Balcony, however, the reference to a stagey sky was purely aesthetic and tantalizingly severed from its historico-economic foundations.

Observing my confusions, one of the artists had provided me with some research material that included the reproduction of a painting by Edward Hopper. It was only by gazing upon this Hopper painting of a movie theater interior that helped me more correctly penetrate the strategies behind the quixotic installation. In the Hopper, the backs of heads of those engrossed at staring at the screen are undercut by something to the right, in the foreground: a young usherette in uncomfortable shoes standing near a side exit. Her thoughts appear entirely elsewhere, and she is probably impatient to change her surroundings. Likewise, a similar polarity between the engrossed and the alienated seems to be the axis of the Blue Balcony installation. Its clever creators are definitely doubters and skeptics who like to undercut our conventional mesmerizers, but their scalpels are of an unusual kind. By stripping a theater of something generally thought to amuse or engross us—they are hoping to discover a form of ecstasy nestled nearer the void.

Thus have they created a theater with a big picture window where a screen should be; and whereas we, the

audience, thinking ourselves at the movies, are preparing to submit to some kind of engrossment (we hope), that hypnotic promise is pushed into the wings to reveal the nakedness of an everyday landscape. This is not to say that the constructors of this installation have not taken care to enrich it with a wealth of historically aesthetic references borrowed from an exhaustive variety of sources—from Maeterlinck to Antheil, from Genet’s balcony to Socrates and Bluebeard, from Goya to even the Cathari. But as I’ve already mentioned, the requirement is that such suggestions remain cryptic, almost as if it is only the texture of their presence, rather than their interpretation, or even the fact of their being noticed and interpreted by us, that matters most. And indeed, such is the pageantry of life itself, as we move through it with thousands of molecular combinations waiting for our interpretation yet indifferent to our failure to do so. I believe that these artists are partly locked in a kind of rebellion against interpretation, preferring to keep on their toes and confine the rumblings of certain meanings to recesses as hidden as the unobtainable elements of an id. This creates a fullness and a tension, which sounds a little dangerous, doesn’t it? But perhaps it is the very definition of depth.

Confusing, not to say the least, but tantalizing all the same time, and beautifully carried off, and inspiring us to ask what? why? how? Expressing myself similarly, I was generously rewarded with answers. This theater without a screen, or rather this movie palace with a transparent see-through or invisible screen is, apparently, also an examination of the “cinema of attraction,” a term coined by Tom Gunning in interpreting Walter Benjamin’s 1935-6 essay “The Artwork in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility,” a text also dissected by Miriam Hansen in an essay entitled “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: ‘the Blue Flower in the Land of Technology.’” Quite clearly, Hansen focuses on a principal point of Benjamin’s essay through Gunning and stresses that, “This term [cinema of attraction] offers a historical concept of film spectatorship which takes its cue from modes of fascination prevalent in early cinema, feeding on attractions such as the magical and illusionist power of filmic representation, its kinetic and temporal manipulations (not yet subordinated to character movement and the chronological momentum of linear narrative) and, above all, an openly exhibitionist tendency epitomized by the recurring look of actors at the camera.”

It’s weird to see an idea like that set forth for me like a conceptual discovery. I come from a generation that unquestionably considered experimental, non-narrative filmmakers—Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs or (somewhat

later) Michael Snow—as givens, not alternatives that anyone with any interest in film needed to be explained. You might say that my and my friends’ rebellion against these men and their experiments with form and image led us back around to narratives that we considered more subversive than the ballets mécaniques of the more abstract film underground, because of the sociological insights of the former, parodying as they did so many middle class assumptions about class, sex and gender in the popular Hollywood genres of the time. Consequently, my friends and I tended to be aficionados of the Ridiculous in film, be it the Kuchar Brothers or Jack Smith or some of the Warhol/Morrisey narrative experiments as well as of those bold female documentarians like Shirley Clarke.

However, reverting to such a thought has revealed only once again my limitations in judgment, which were soon revealed by another explanation in Benjamin’s much-reproduced essay on cinema. I was soon to learn that it isn’t what you see or don’t see when you position yourself in a cinema as a spectator—be the film non-narrative or narrative; it is instead what you project back at the view just by gazing at it. Rather than becoming passively infused by its light entering your eyes, you are projecting onto that projecting surface a confining veil that is highly mediated by your social experiences. What is more, the very reproducibility of that image creates an “aura,” which Benjamin defines “as the unique appearance [Erscheinung] of a distance, however close it may be.” What constantly generates desire but never delivers, he seems to be saying, must always be thought of as remaining far away. (The crucial controversy over image and distance rages at this very moment as older auteurs like David Lynch complain about watching movies on a tiny digital screen even though the extreme closeness of our eyes to it creates an image on the retina that is probably not much smaller than the retina image produced by watching a screen from the back of a movie theater.)

Following that necessity, why should we not, then, dissolve the palpable image of the screen itself, as have the creators of The Blue Balcony, so that our leaping gaze, desperately seeking and desiring the tantalization of unattainability, will be thrown into the an even more exaggerated version of romantic agony? This, I have come to conclude, is the principal strategy of those resourceful and iconoclastic gaze-assassins who have constructed The Blue Balcony.

from the upcoming publication
The Gallows are Busy from Cicada Press

Daniel Sherer on the Blue Balcony

Daniel is a Professor of Architectural History and Theory at Columbia University and Lecturer in Architectural History at Yale University. Published in *Domus*, *Log*, *Perspecta*, *Journal of Architecture*, *Assemblage*, *Zodiac*, *Design Book Review*, *Art Journal*, and *Giornale dell'Architettura*. He has translated *Manfredo Tafuri's Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects*.

Poised between the evocation and loss of cinematic illusion, the Blue Balcony is a theater predicated on paradox. The audience in this small space faces the area where the screen is normally found, only to discover that it is not there, that it is has vanished into thin air along with the customary conventions of cinematic representation. In its place, a large plate glass window opens to a view of the garden beyond. A specially prepared light apparatus installed within the side walls responds to the invisible film by simulating the dance of stippled projected light beams on its surfaces, even though the source of those beams — constitutive, normally, of the projected images themselves — is conspicuously missing.

Stripping the site of the projected image to a degree zero condition, the Blue Balcony offers a wry commentary on the unstable equilibrium between the ever increasing ideological demand for the lack of the real and the real of the lack which is never in short supply in human affairs. It pares the cinematic, and by extension, the aesthetic experience down to its non-essence, as if to provide a critique of cinematic fascination by offering a set of peripheral traces as a negative simulacrum of what is usually the main attraction. The ultimate illusion, or so this enigmatic work would seem to imply, is to have no illusions, or at least none that can occupy anything but one's radically attenuated peripheral vision.

Tom Cole on the Blue Balcony

Tom is a writer and performing artist. His performances and installations have been shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, The Revolving Museum, Participant Inc, and the Clocktower Gallery. He is a recent MacDowell playwriting fellow and a recipient of a LEF foundation grant.

“Instead of a screen, we faced a large glass window that looked out into the real world -- a concrete wall framed by the greenery of the trees in the garden. No images were being projected upon this blank slate. The walls of the cinema were lined with scenery — the old fashioned two-dimensional type --stylized vignettes of fountains, animals, and labyrinths seemed to vibrate in tune with the soundtrack of the film. The music was of the 1920's, an old cartoon, zany and happy and at times suddenly dangerous — as if our cartoon protagonist might fall off a cliff.

I stared at the concrete wall, the ghost of the film pulsating around me, and imagined what images might be cueing the undulating waves of light. After a while we talked, mulling over favorite cinemas from our childhoods, drive-ins. And then our attention turned again to the window, the wall, the moving pictures in our minds, and a time when going to the cinema was as magical as the Blue Balcony.”

et al. Artist's Statement

et al.'s installations draw attention to the residual conflicts of the Modern subjectivity by interlacing the fragmented social experience of the present moment with its historical emergence. This is done by violating the sanctity of medium specific art, design, architecture and craft to engender a non-hierarchical examination into the last century's *progress*.

When the abbreviation et al. is used in a sentence it denotes that there is a group of people who are more than an author cares to reveal. As an artist group that is not limited by a set number of participants who contribute to the intellectual as well as material conception and production of the work, we are not convinced that the separation and individuation of our names is an asset to the overall form an artwork takes.

Solo Shows:

- *The Blue Balcony*, in: Le Petit Versailles, New York, 03.2013.
- *Cinema Palace Lecture/ Performance*, École nationale supérieure d'arts de Paris-Cergy, Paris, 12.2010
- *Haunted House*, Frankfurt am Main, 10.2010.

Group Shows:

- *Gold Foil, Blue Tape, and Three Pin Spots*, in: *HPSCHD*, Eyebeam, New York, 05.2013
- *Taco Truck*, in: *Lüften*, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt am Main 05-06.2012.
- *Parangolés*, in: Vaginal Davis' performance *V. D is speaking from the Diaphragm*, in: *Camp Anticamp*, HAU, Berlin, 04.2012.
- *En Passant*, in: *Surreal Objects. Three Dimensional Works from Dali to Man Ray*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, 02.2011.

For all inquiries, please write to: et.al.web@gmail.com